INTRODUCTION

The *Adab* of Urbanity

Encountering the City

The history of a city can be written in infinite ways. Histories of early modern Isfahan have portrayed the city through its institutions and through its nodal function at the intersection of the arts, politics, and trade, linking it to larger imperial and global networks.[1] Isfahan's monuments and built environment—the palace, the mosque, and the religious seminary—have been privileged sites and sources in the writing of its history. Scholars have examined the Dutch East India Company archives to foreground Isfahan's political economy and the silk trade that linked the city to Europe.[2] Mercantile documents, letters, and the business correspondence of Armenian merchants from Isfahan's suburb of New Julfa connect networks of merchant families trading in Iranian silk, Indian textiles, and gems to an early modern global economy. Historians have mined these commercial documents to study the trading habits and practices that sustained a network of Julfan Armenian merchants from Madras to Manilla in the east and Venice and Amsterdam to the west.[3] More recently, a multifaceted approach has focused on Georgian and Armenian slave converts to Islam who became governors and court functionaries in the Safavi imperial household. These slave elites have been studied as agents of centralization, because they were engaged in building the political and cultural life of the city through their patronage of the arts, architecture, and trade.[4]

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The City as Anthology explores Isfahan through the lens of seventeenth-century anthologies. Thousands of manuscripts produced in Isfahan assembled household objects ranging from portraits and letters from friends to poems depicting the central square, marriage contracts, and talismans. Authors collected, curated, and bound together material generated by the culture of *adab*, or etiquette and conduct, to learn how to act and relate to other residents of a diverse and ever-growing capital city. The anthology, itself a medium of communication, was a new kind of book. In Persian it was called a *majmu'a* (from the Arabic root *j.m.ʿ*), literally "gathered together," which assembled verbal texts, or a *muraqqa'* (from the Arabic root *r.q.ʿ*), or "patchwork," which collected visual texts. In this book I read both the *majmu'a* and the *muraqqa'* as collections of city life. Both pedagogical and experiential, these visual and verbal texts anthologize the city; they preserve the material artifacts of city encounters and the conditions of communication that bring the urban scenery into focus. Moreover, anthologies accumulate histories of friendship alongside individual and family histories. They enliven the cityscape with their personal stories of love, fear and betrayal, and loss that map the emotional topography of Isfahan.

Anthologizers—as far as we know, all of them male—compiled manuals of composition and rhetoric, model letters, drawings and paintings, and essays and poems that they encountered through networks of friends, bringing together different genres to learn and take pleasure from within the domestic realm of their households. Collected in the intimate space of the home, anthologies helped fashion, and in turn were shaped by, urban sensibilities. Although authorship of anthologies was a male prerogative, the practice of anthologizing linked families of male and female readers and personally implicated them in Isfahan's culture. By archiving family histories, anthologies document how members forged social and affective bonds with kin and with friends, acts that made the city legible for themselves. Anthologies helped residents write their own place in the city or communicate the city's splendors to those not living in Isfahan, making their own journeys through its sprawling quarters legible today.

The history of *reading* the city as text goes back to Roland Barthes's engagement with urban semiotics and Kevin Lynch's visual modeling of the city as an image perceived by its residents.[5] For Barthes, the city speaks to its inhabitants in a language that becomes legible through sociability. Lynch, on the other hand, develops his concept of legibility in the relationship between the subject and the society as it is made and remade through the process of perceiving, conceiving, mapping, and

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moving through urban spaces.[6] I borrow Lynch's language of urban imageability and legibility to read Isfahan through the heuristic of the anthology, or fragmentary city readings assembled by residents into a codex. In addition to reading, I argue that seeing, desiring, and writing are entangled modalities of encounter that allowed residents to experience the city and to anthologize the city in complementary ways. In *The City as Anthology* I investigate how the verbal and the visual cultivate the senses to affect urbanity; residents read texts in circulation, curated them, and then wrote their own crafted works to display their city knowledge. Anthologies constitute spaces of assembly, gatherings of dispersed city texts reinscribed by authors and scribes into a manuscript. Through words and images residents in Isfahan wrote the city and performed their social relations. Their habits of collecting objects of *adab*, texts that taught them social etiquette and sexual conduct, expose city practices and can be seen as artifacts of Isfahan's urbanization as a capital. More than artifactual, the anthology is agentive. As a product of urban aesthetic, the anthology generates ways of desiring the beauty of the city of Isfahan, shaping and being shaped by styles and manners of urbanity. The intimately intertwined acts of seeing, reading, writing, and desiring the city recursively reproduce the anthology, the household, and the author in distinct and often contradictory ways.

By way of seventeenth-century anthologies, my history of Isfahan concentrates on the city as a space of urban knowledge production beyond the institution of the imperial court and the Shi'a religious establishment, which were two vital centers of training and transmission.[7] Linking practices of reading the city together with modes of writing in the city, the anthologies draw on the dissemination of urban knowledge. Like David Henkin's work on Antebellum New York in his *City Reading*, my study literally reads the surfaces of Isfahan's domes and murals to explore the roles of the written word along with the figural in the urban experience. To access the various ways in which residents imagined their relationships to city spaces, Henkin's reading of the city focuses on *actual* texts, such as newspapers, banners, and posters that take material form on the stage of public life.[8] The traffic between monumental inscriptions and writings on paper collected in anthologies is key to my understanding of how residents of Isfahan made sense of their city in a practical way. Deploying different agencies and scales involved in the act of seeing the city helps to shed light on how residents learned to read and rewrite their own experience of Isfahan. We can read monumental epigraphy, or calligraphic inscriptions on the walls and domes of mosques, to comprehend the political-religious discourse

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produced by the Safavi court and the Shi'a religious establishment, but we must read anthologies to understand how the imperial discourse was woven into the lived practices of Isfahan's inhabitants. Anthologies are tools for understanding state-sponsored forms of urbanity, because they are artifacts for working out ways of living in the city that negotiated with or even explicitly contested the ideal city.

Anthologies locate Isfahan's households within the urban morphology. However, generated and then collected and assembled in the interior spaces of the house, many anthologies were objects fashioned with the precise intent of traversing the spaces *between* households—as letters, paintings, and gifts. These objects were assembled in private homes and ultimately collected in households, but their first-order purpose was to forge connections outside the household. What is being archived is a record of the household's life *outside* the confines of the house. This is what makes these collections simultaneously domestic and urban—they are a record of the complex symbiosis of life in Isfahan. For the circulation of letters and paintings, I exploit what Janet Abu-Lughod has called semiprivate space.[9] Abu-Lughod was referring to features of the urban morphology and the social practices that defined them. The practice of letter and gift exchange or the performance of desire in the bazaar is found rather explicitly on the margins between public and private space. Moreover, these practices deliberately blur the distinction between the two spaces. Anthologies give us clues about how to read (make meaning out of) public monuments or spaces in personal ways—or manners that are significant for the household and its members.

Certainly, the word and the city share a long and connected history. Since the early formation of Mesopotamian city-states, the written word has been deployed to tally agricultural surplus. The very foundation of the city was contingent, in part, on the verbal. I initially focus on monumental epigraphy, designs, and paintings found on the domes and walls of the city of Isfahan; these images affected not only what residents saw but also how they read, learned to desire, and write the city. The scripting of a new program of monumental epigraphy, whereby the court and the mosque inscribed their power onto the built environment, familiarized residents with images as words and words as image(s). Blurring the verbal and the visual, Isfahan's animated surfaces solicited the gaze and authorized engagement, inciting residents and visitors to participate in its beauty. My anthologizing of Isfahan is part of this critical genealogy of city reading.[10]

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The City of Isfahan

The City as Anthology tells the story of Isfahan at a moment of creation of the new capital center set in motion by Shah Abbas I (r. 1587–1629), thus laying the conditions for the making of an imperial city of rule and global trade. Writing and painting on walls and paper distributed different scales of literacy in the Safavi capital (1593–1722) during the early modern era of urbanization and state formation, which in Isfahan was contingent on the city's conversion to Shi'ism.[11] Isfahan's new urbanism attracted talent, labor, and knowledge and incited cultural production across different forms and media. This authoritative moment provides a unique context from which to investigate the mutual shaping of the social, cultural, and religious spheres of a city in transformation.

Residents and travelers to Isfahan would have been struck by the volume of traffic as well as by the vibrant turquoise, lapis, and yellow tiles of its domes and portals, the minarets of its mosques, the floral paintings on the walls of storefronts surrounding the main square and entrance to the bazaar, and especially the ubiquitous presence of the written word. Epigraphs, such as those engraved in stone exempting barbers and bathhouse employees from taxes, emblazoned the walls and domes of mosques and were visible at eye level. The ever-present medium of writing cultivated a visual aesthetic and transmitted a sense of urbane civility. Placed outside, in open spaces, the prevailing public function of epigraphy was to solicit the gaze and educate spectators as they moved through the city. With its use of monumental writing authorizing conversion to Shi'ism and encouraging innovative aesthetic forms of calligraphy and tilework developed by Isfahan's artists and artisans, this epigraphic program had a determining influence on the capital's visual culture. The use of symbolic Quranic calligraphy was a visible instrument of communication that spoke to residents with multiple registers of literacy. Graphic letters naming Allah, the prophet Muhammad, and the Shi'a Imam Ali in geometric shapes became legible icons even for the unlettered (Figure 0.1). Verses in Arabic from the Quran and Persian love poetry that evoked the garden of paradise filled the space around the new city square, known as the Naqsh-i Jahan, or "image of the world." These were accompanied by colorful paintings depicting the beauty and erotic pleasures of the "abode of the blessed" populated by delightful female and male youths. This practice of blurring letters with figures created images that infused the urban space with symbols of the divine, especially on the domes, archways, and

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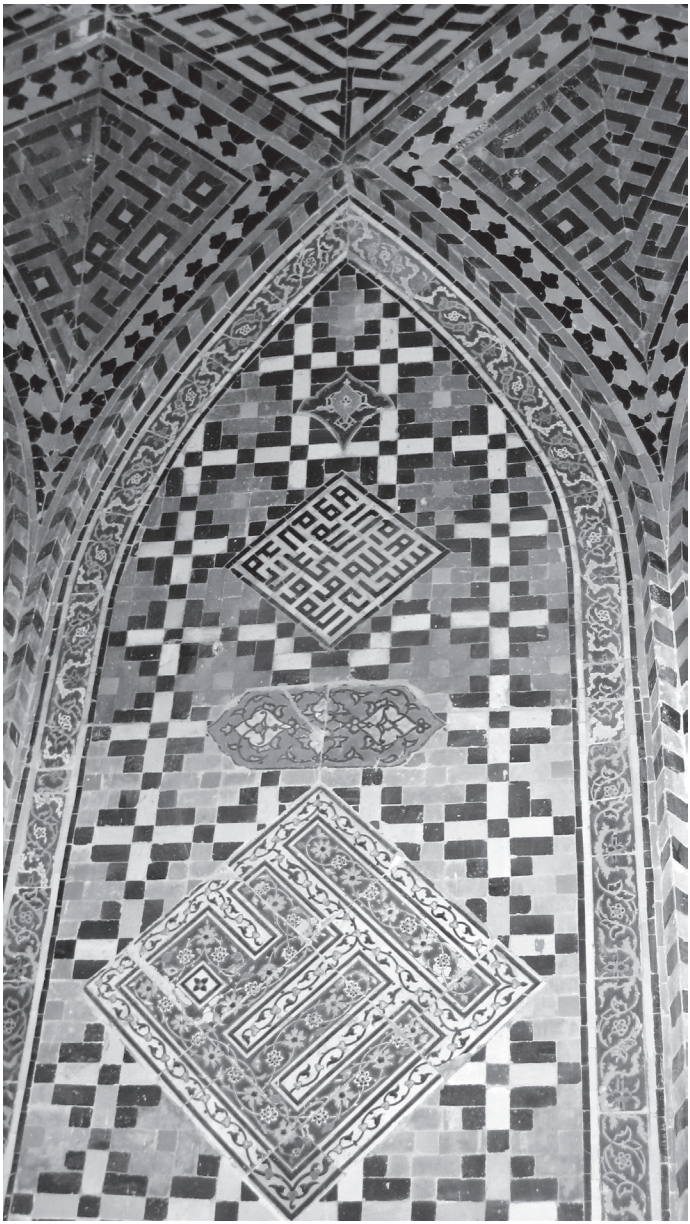

FIGURE 0.1 Interior wall and honeycomb arch of the new Friday Prayer Mosque inscribed with the Arabic phrase *Subhan Allah* (Glory be to Allah) on the top diamond and *Allah* on the bottom diamond of the arch. Photo by Kathryn Babayan.

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walls of the central square. Carved in large calligraphic script (*thulth*) visible from the ground, the meanings of verses depicting paradise were supplemented with painted images of the heavenly garden on the arcade walls. Eroticism was inscribed into the Naqsh-i Jahan, central to the experience of Isfahan, which placed the cultivation of the sensory as a requisite for learning how to read the city square.

The bazaar and the mosque, the two lungs of a Muslim city, were separated in Isfahan by a vast open space bounded by an arcade with 200 storefronts (Figure 0.2). Developed in 1590, the Naqsh-i Jahan was designed to orient the medieval city along a new axis; it would become the site of a revolution in the function of urban outdoor spaces.[12] *Naqsh* refers to "design," in both the figurative and verbal senses of engraving and intent, and is often associated with a sheet of paper. Authors and poets came to understand the new central square as the surface of a page, a blank sheet of paper, reading a range of possibilities into its composition. Much like a scribe, the Safavi king Shah Abbas I wrote the space for his city center from dust to be flattened and filled with verbal and visual texts for his residents to experience. The double entendre in its name, *naqsh*, also cleverly links the paintings on the walls of its arcade and the bazaar entrance (Qaysariyya) to the Quranic verses, creating an analogy between rectangular space and a sheet of paper. Images and words inscribe erotic sights and rewards along the walls of the square to create paradise on earth. Fully exposed to the light of day, these elements made "the image of the world" manifest as an array of legible power scripted in calligraphic symbols of the divine across the surfaces of this new square.

FIGURE 0.2 Panoramic view of the Naqsh-i Jahan square looking toward the Qaysariyya Bazaar (facing the viewer) to the Imperial Gate (left), the Shaykh Lufullah Mosque (right), and the new Friday Prayer Mosque (vantage point of the photographer). Photo by Mohammad Sarraf.

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Expressed in an idiom that drew on the Sufi discourse of love and beauty, these verbal and visual productions moved from a metaphoric space of the garden to that of the city, the new urban space where paradise was to be lived. Sufi epistemology imagines the body as the microcosm, the macrocosm as the universe, and the garden as the space that acts as a mediating heuristic between the two.[13] Once Isfahan was configured as paradise, it had to appropriate the rhetorical figure of a garden, with its metaphorical logic of excess, for spiritual union with the divine to be manifest. Much like the metaphor of the garden, Isfahan became the site of extravagance and abundance, the extension of the divine, to be desired and recognized in all its bounty and potential. As the producer of *adab*, Isfahan drew subjects, men and women from different regions and backgrounds, into the urban agential sphere to fulfill its promise, as though beckoning residents to inscribe pomp and exaggeration onto the blank folios of an anthology, and thereby to redefine, satirize, and disturb the urbane endeavor. It is not surprising, then, that writing also underwent a transformation, moving from epigraphy and the media of stone and ceramics to the realm of paper, which could then be assembled into household anthologies. Both monumental public writing and the more intimate process of writing on paper point to a larger cultural trend whereby the world was captured in poetry, calligraphy, and painting in historically and materially recognizable ways.

Passing by a commanding five-story royal building at the entry of the palace complex, a spectator would see the golden dome of a private royal mosque that signaled the intimate relationship between politics and religion. At Friday prayer, artisans, merchants, and shoppers walked from the bazaar across the 1,840-foot span of public space, where an urban economy of piety, pleasure, and politics flowed under the gaze of court and mosque. To the south, they faced a magnificent tiled portal of the first Friday Prayer Mosque inscribed with a famous testimony from the prophet Muhammad: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate."[14] Flanked by two minarets, this architectural masterpiece was built to proclaim Shi'ism as the religion of the Safavi Empire. Shah Abbas I appointed the Shi'a scholar Shaykh Baha'i (d. 1621) chief religious dignitary, the Shaykh al-Islam of Isfahan. Together the shah and the shaykh worked closely to cultivate and assemble a Muslim community of Sunni and Shi'a residents in Isfahan. The shaykh's role was to help bolster the shah's legitimacy and devise a communal platform for the inclusion of Sunni

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and Shi'a followers in worship. Residents of Isfahan, who were mostly Sunni, were enticed to participate in the fashioning of a singular religious collective. Shaykh Baha'i succeeded in popularizing the Shi'a religion; as part of his conversion strategy, he composed in Persian the *Jamiʿ-i ʿAbbasi* (Abbas's Collective), a manual on proper etiquette and religious obligations that highlighted shared Sunni and Shi'a rituals and beliefs.[15] In this manual he encouraged the majority Sunni population of Isfahan to enter a new communal space of worship that would, over the *longue durée*, educate and convert them to Shi'ism. Shaykh Baha'i composed the epigraphic program on the mosque's interior walls calling all worshippers of Allah to enter through the gate of Ali and pray in a hall inscribed with stories legitimizing the succession of Ali as the friend of God and Muhammad's vice-regent. By turning this Friday Prayer Mosque into a public record of how religion would elevate believers and strengthen the Shah's sovereignty, Shaykh Baha'i transformed the mosque into a space of collective worship.

The vast open space at the epicenter of Shah Abbas I's imperial creation was flattened and then covered with sand from the Zayanda-rud, the life-giving river, to stage polo games, horse races, fireworks, and mock battles against the Uzbeks, both neighbors and enemies of the Safavis. Shah Abbas I visibly flaunted his authority so that inhabitants might witness his spectacular power in the space of the central square. Commerce and traffic were engineered to flow from the medieval Seljuk center, with its markets and Friday Prayer Mosque, through the tunneled alleys of a new bazaar that opened onto the northern corner of the Naqsh-i Jahan. The bazaar rivaled not only the old commercial enterprises of the medieval city but also the regional bazaar of Tabriz, the former Mongol (Ilkhanid) capital situated on the axis of a vibrant east-west trade. Isfahan's bazaar would make Tabriz's marketplace look provincial.[16] The shah's project transformed the built environment, because he also brought merchants from Tabriz to Isfahan; they would change the physiognomy of the city as a result of this high-end migration. The forced migration of Tabrizi merchants and later Armenian silk merchants (in 1605) to Isfahan ensured the centrality of the capital in the growing global market for Iranian silk.[17] Tabrizi merchants were relocated thanks to the patronage of the shah, who ordered his chief treasurer, Muhibb Ali Beg, to build them a residential suburb named after the king, Abbasabad (the abode of Abbas), where 500 houses were constructed.[18] And for the Armenian merchant community, the shah developed a suburb on the banks

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of the Zayanda River: New Julfa, which was erected and named after their native city razed by the Shah's forces.

The transformation of Isfahan's built environment gave material form to new media and affective ties that, I argue, were bound together in anthologies. The imaginations that anthologizing produced and the choices behind the gathering, excerpting, recording, and ordering of texts represent different techniques of interpreting the city; they reveal a place where, among other things, the refined self was crafted on paper and performed in public. As the male collector curated sentences and verses from known works of poetry and prose, he wrote his own composition. Flaunting their erudition, residents schooled in the ways of urban *adab* actively engaged in inscribing themselves in their city. Generic experimentation with preexisting literary forms generated new compositions that melded verse with prose, mixing media and tropes together, just as it helped to translate the language of mystical love into one of urbane friendship. For instance, modes and moods embedded in the omnipresent form of the Persian *ghazal*,[19] or love poetry, were adapted to compose the prose letter to friends. Likewise, the entire cityscape became the arena of desire for the city disturber (*shahrashub*) to write about the coffeehouse, the hammam, or the central square as erotic spaces of sociability.[20] The discoursing city licensed creative acts of crafting texts and reinscribing the city in the anthology, which helps us think about the material history of writing and illustrating from a less imperial perspective. As this book reveals, urban practices related to seeing, reading, desiring, and writing were intimately related and mutually co-constitutive, informing both the lived experience of the city and its (re)assembly as domestic anthology.

The multiplication of materials for writing in and about the city is crucial to the curation of the urban self. Writing on paper entails attention to knowledge production, whereas the assembly of folios into anthologies represents different ways of desiring and seeing the city. To probe the materiality of the history of collecting, we must unpack the relationship between urban transformations and the collected experiences of city residents. First, the production of paper as a medium of communication changed the way literature and the visual arts were composed and consumed. In Isfahan paper was produced from rags, making it affordable and more readily available. Paper became the foundation of a new culture of literacy, driven in particular by the needs of an expanding and centralizing state, which required the documentation of revenues from lands (*tiyul*) granted to governors

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and their retinues in lieu of salaries. An economic boom generated a demand for paper to produce letters of credit, contracts, and account books that would catalog trade for a growing group of merchants—Isfahani, Tabrizi, Armenian, and Indian buyers, sellers, and agents in regional and global trade.[21] In turn, the practice of documenting benefited the literary and visual arts, because gains from trade allowed prospering merchant and craftsmen to engage in the *adab* of urbanity as authors, patrons, and collectors.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, Isfahan's population had grown to about half a million residents. According to French jeweler Jean Baptiste Chardin, Isfahan was one of the biggest metropoles he had traveled to in Europe and Asia, equal in size to London.[22] The resettlement of at least 6,000 merchant families from the two cities of Tabriz and Old Julfa, in addition to the city's draw as a new center of commerce for craftsmen, painters, poets, and students of religion, helped to produce a diverse mix of residents. Once Isfahan became established as the empire's political center, for the first time in Safavi history the entire court as well as the provincial governors built residences in the capital. If by the end of the seventeenth century the Armenian suburb grew to house 6,000 families, with a population of 30,000 inhabitants and twelve churches, the entire city of Isfahan must have experienced a similar doubling of its population.[23]

Isfahan was not just a center of an empire. It was an ideal city—to which residents, old and new, attached their sense of belonging. How did the rapid increase and mixing of populations from different confessional, sectarian, and linguistic backgrounds lead Isfahan's residents to encounter and relate to one another? Relying on new media of communication, strangers to the city assembled tools with which to connect in the making of shared and familiar experiences.

The Anthology

To participate in Isfahan's fashionable circles, men had to be versed in the culture of *adab*, a set of rules of conduct and behaviors—etiquette—that defined proper comportment through gestures and words. The Safavi court and the Shi'a clerical establishment were the impresarios of this adabizing project. As court and mosque joined forces to centralize power in Isfahan and convert residents to Shi'ism, manuals on proper social and sexual conduct, speech, and writing proliferated in unprecedented ways. Conduct and etiquette manuals, themselves the products of

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literacy, simultaneously produced knowledge among those who wished to advance their status. In other words, even as court and mosque deployed such manuals as disciplinary technologies, cultural how-to guides that refined and defined courtly culture, they engendered verbal and visual literacy *across* class lines.

I argue that the history of reception that the anthologies represent was integral to the state-sponsored adabizing project and the varying subjectivities it produced. Although conversion entailed the distribution of manuals that sought to discipline its subjects and control their conduct and speech, manuals also fashioned urban sensibilities. Moreover, verbal and visual products of *adab* were part of a whole range of anthologies, subjective knowledge production, and literacies attained by individual and household collectors. The letters, poetry, stories, and drawings that the anthologies stitched together point to *adab* objects shared by communities of literacy in Isfahan; they give us a sense of the household reader who encountered these diverse connected pieces, fragment by fragment, page by page, as a discrete book. Such acts of collecting and reading connect the literate experience to the spectacle of public life, shaping communication and the performance of a new urbanity that fashioned affective communities who created the city.

Every medium of communication has distinct protocols and usage styles. To embody Isfahan's urbanity, the culture of *adab* had to be learned and performed in the elite, artisan, and merchant sectors of a society in the making. Consumers of etiquette-based ideals cultivated the habits of collecting *adab* objects. Letters, proper conduct manuals, and portraits were pedagogical tools with symbolic capital for residents who aspired to participate in the creation of the new urbanism of Isfahan.[24] As a result, the agency of residents in drawing and writing, and, by extension, the author's purpose and audience, began to broaden and diversify. For example, no longer was writing limited to students or scribes copying manuscripts as functions of religious authorization, memorization, and courtly legitimacy; rather, writers wrote, copied, and collected as household author.[25] Elite households also hired their own scribes, who would procure texts in circulation for their patrons and preserve them for the family archive. However, many households did not have the means to hire scribes, so men wrote and authored their own anthologies. Occasionally male patrons and scribes are named in anthologies, but most remain anonymous.[26] They represent a range of households in Isfahan and demonstrate the breadth and popularity of these interlaced *adab* practices.

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My research indicates multiple practices of collecting, copying, authoring, and producing anthologies, although the full scope of anthologizing practices found in seventeenth-century Isfahan remains to be studied by the next generation. Certainly, for seventeenth-century Isfahan, anthologies are unique sources that bring people's lives into view. This is particularly important for a city with no extant state or city archives. The rich variety of habits of collecting expose the professional and personal lives of households and their ties to generations of city life.[27] Thus part of my work here is to use anthologies to map the social space of the household in Isfahan. Characteristic of some anonymous anthologies is the legibility of the author's profession, where he records the kinds of material he uses at work. Consider, for example, the anonymous anthology belonging to a religious judge. The author collects legal documents in Persian with Arabic formulas for marriage, divorce, sales, and rent contracts—tools he used to settle the everyday cases brought before him. Along with these documents, the judge also penned a talisman to protect the health of his ailing child (Figure 0.3).[28] It is only once we turn to folio 50v of this anthology

FIGURE 0.3 The folio from the *majmu'a* belonging to Kazim the judge. Several talismans are recorded in the bottom left margin, one of which is to break the fever of a sick child. Malik Library, MS 2551.

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that the name of a woman, Jahan Banu, appears in the margins. With her own hand, she identifies herself as Kazim's daughter and gifts the anthology to her son.[29] The identity of the author is revealed by his daughter, who probably inherited this anthology. Anthologists such as judge Kazim gathered their professional tools into a manuscript and mobilized devices with which to work, socialize, and behave in the city. The public life of this collector-judge Kazim is inscribed alongside his familial concerns. Although his daughter Jahan Banu did not author the anthology, she partook in the household practice of anthologizing, inheriting, and then passing her work on to her son, who himself might have learned from it and made use of its contents as an aspiring judge.[30]

Anthologies were composed of both words (*majmuʿa*) and images (*muraqqaʿ*), and although verbal and visual compositions were not bound together in an anthology, paintings and drawings were probably collected separately in households and preserved in large envelopes depicted in miniature paintings. How are we to read these two verbal and visual texts collectively? In my project I break with past approaches by bringing the understudied object of the *majmuʿa* into conversation with the *muraqqaʿ*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries collectors bound together into the *muraqqaʿ* dispersed paintings and drawings that had been purchased by seventeenth-century merchants and artisans who participated in the economy of *adab* in Isfahan.[31] Drawn on single sheets of paper, illustrations could be purchased or commissioned by clients directly from the painter. Ink drawings certainly sold for a lower price than those painted with color. Many were executed with quick strokes of the pen and capture a range of urban characters drawn for a socially diverse audience. All types were portrayed—from craftsmen to dervishes and scholars—and all were representations of the men who lived and worked in Isfahan. Female subjects were sometimes depicted, but they were far fewer than male subjects. Purchased by residents from different walks of life, or gifted by artists to their friends, these images are quintessential city readings. Like words curated by authors of the *majmuʿa*s, these illustrations are images that interpret the city. Artists and clients were particularly interested in male portraits or in portraits of couples who modeled urbane gestures and postures of intimacy and sexual desire. A particular subject of collector fascination was the act of reading: male figures posing with a letter, a poem, a book, or a talisman, as in Figure 0.4. I interpret these images alongside verbal anthologies to demonstrate the different ways that Isfahan

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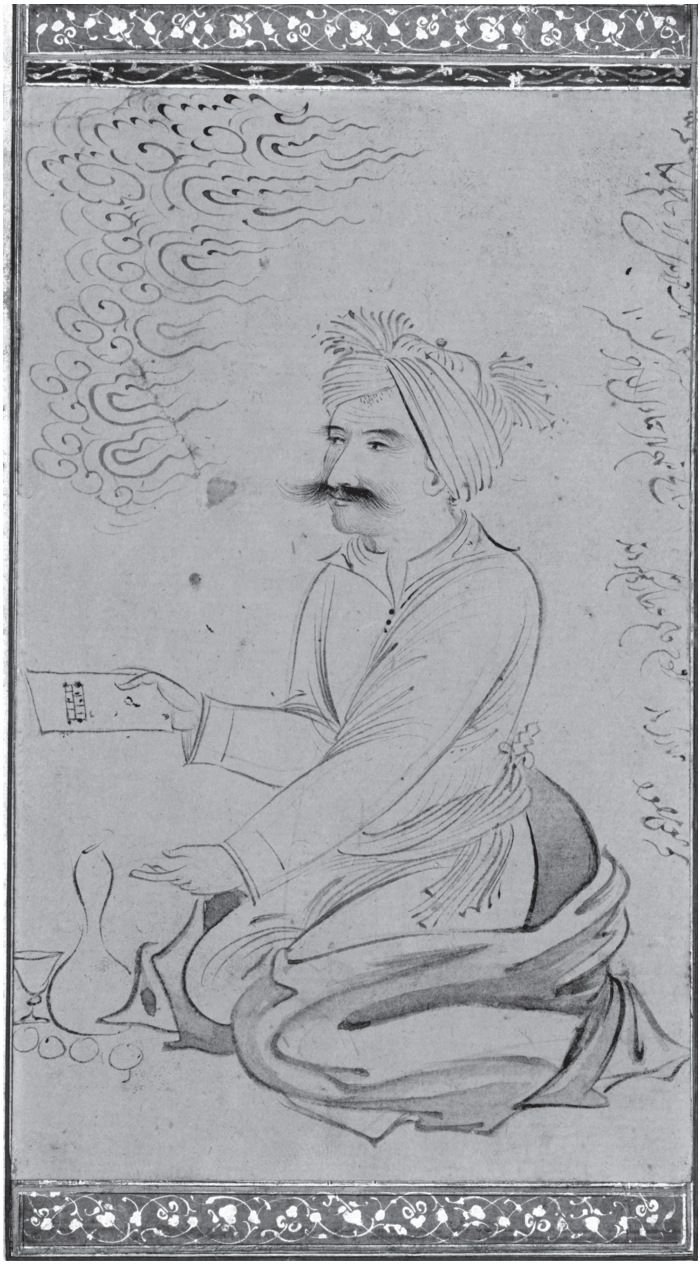

FIGURE 0.4 A man holding a recipe for a talisman in his hand. It is signed by Mu'in Musavvir and dated 1663; whereabouts unknown.

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can be seen as scenes of desire to be read and then written. They provide material evidence for the relationships between literacy, collecting, and didacticism. Together, these verbal and visual productions ground my analysis of how Isfahan's urbanity transformed the communication of social relations.

Artists and authors were keenly aware of the historical moment they inhabited. Consequently, their work bears the mark of their time. The Persian words *taza* (fresh) and *vuquʿi* (realistic) are commonly ascribed to the chronicling of history and the composition of poetry in seventeenth-century Isfahan.[32] Anthologies compiled by authors or their scribes show cognizance of the novel act of assembling household collections, just as artists knew they were creating something new on a sheet of paper, independent of the royal atelier. Free of courtly conventions around the narrative arts of the manuscript, artists could sell their work on the market. Although earlier artists did sell work in the bazaar, in seventeenth-century Isfahan many made this their primary means of livelihood. The turn to portraiture (*surat*) in painting and the naming of the beloved in poetry (*maktab-i vuquʿi*), is, I argue, correlated with the social economy of trade and *adab*, which established a clientele of collectors who valued *adab* objects and who could afford to acquire them. This turn to historicity, clearly evident in the *majmuʿa* and *muraqqaʿ*, brings Isfahan's population into distinct, even intimate, focus.

This study, which combines historiographies of the book with scholarship on urban space, intervenes in contemporary discussions about experience and materiality from the vantage point of gender and sexuality. The written word has been privileged as the site of literacy in the medieval Arabic-speaking world across a number of works that focus on histories of the manuscript or that study reading practices which connected social networks to knowledge production.[33] Literacy in these works is centered on writing, reading, and the materiality of the manuscript. But literacy is a complex matter. It was not just those who owned or had access to pen, ink, and paper and who had a gift for scribing who were literate. Lack of writing skills did not preclude one's ability to recognize, compose, or engage in the magical and auratic public presence of the word. In the chapters that follow I demonstrate how the broader habits of anthologizing intersected with urban practices of reading, seeing, desiring, and writing the city. By interpolating its differently inscribed surfaces, the city solicited the gaze, because it taught residents how to read and recognize new forms of sociability. I analyze script on the walls and domes of mosques

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as well as decrees engraved in stone and displayed to the urban community as creating a particular effect of sensory legibility, linking the creation of anthologies to the production of the city. The sensory and sensual stimulation of Isfahan's visual and verbal culture fostered an ethics and aesthetics of respectability, fashioning Safavi subjects into urbane and sexual selves, who in turn desired, performed, and read the beauty of the capital city of Isfahan.

The *Adab* of Friendship

The City as Anthology reads Isfahan's conversion to Shi'ism alongside its physical and cultural expansion through the anthologizing practices by which residents declared and performed their urbanity. The prohibitions against adultery (*zina'*) and sodomy (*livat*), along with brothels and wine bars, communicated the Safavi shahs' and the Shi'a religious establishment's power to enforce sharia law. Public documents signaling these proscriptions were meant to achieve order and discipline; they were visible words intended to regulate sexuality and sociability in Isfahan's various urban spaces—in bathhouses and brothels and in the streets. Just as the capital city's physical renovations generated new social formations, they also transformed affective ties between those in authority and their subjects. The social becomes a productive analytic for interpreting the transformation of the city beyond its symbolic and urbanistic features. Mystical registers of *adab* were being translated onto new urban forms of sociability, and this translation—or to put it differently, this conversion—from mystic love to urban love in the seventeenth century is documented in abundance by anthologies. In fact, the spirit-body bond between lovers and beloveds was appropriated and applied to wide-ranging performances of amity and sovereignty in the broader contexts of the city, the court, the bazaar, the hammam, and the coffeehouse. In the setting of an emerging urbanism, this new *adab* of urbanity required the cultivation of rituals and habits for communicating with other refined subjects; residents had to learn urbane mannerisms in gesture and gaze.

The ethics of friendship were of particular concern to the court and the mosque, because friends were the building blocks of sociability and community. Mystic rituals of love, desiring eros, and obedience were deployed by the court to discipline Isfahan's social order. We can visually see on a mural in the Forty Pillars Palace an image of Shah Abbas I as the beloved (see Figure 1.3). He holds the central gaze, with

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a wine cup in hand, while his novices are being initiated into his court through corporal punishment; they are struck by the stick of the Safavi mystical order, the *chub-i tariqat*.[34] Three decades after his death Shah Abbas I is remembered on the palace walls as the mystic cupbearer. Neither Shah Ismail (d. 1524), the messianic founder of the dynasty, nor his son Shah Tahmasb (d. 1576), the mystic lover of Ali, are cast with wine cup in hand. The imperial story narrated on the walls of the Audience Hall confirms a genealogy that had been contested during the first century of Safavi rule. Shah Abbas I is memorialized for having put an end to the second civil war (1587–1592), quashing the Nuqtavi millenarian rebellion (1593) that threatened his household's hegemony. The mural celebrates the apocalyptic figure of Shah Abbas I as the architect of a new Islamic millennium, drawing on the language of mystic love to domesticate male homoerotic desire and tame the masculine aggression of the courtly and warrior class where friendship was deployed as male rule.

The desire to delay the apocalypse conveyed in courtly and Shi'a religious discourse following the death of Shah Abbas I played on an imminent expectation of the arrival of the Shi'a Mahdi (messiah) born into the Safavi lineage. This temporal postponement was accompanied by the production of disciplinary *adab* manuals on male public conduct. In character with mystic desire edging between avowal and disavowal, the suspension of the experience of paradise, replete with promises of erotic delights, was to be relegated to the near future. Barthes has drawn attention to the "infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse," and in this context the erotic dimension of the city, which he uses interchangeably with sociability, is not only a place of encounter and exchange in Isfahan but also a place of anticipation, enactment, and renunciation.[35]

Different ideals of sociability—whether at court, in the bazaar, or among the literati—drew on the emotional economy of friendship. However, in the practice of *yearning* for love (*'ishq*) associated with the mystic desire (*'ishq*) for ideal union, friendship came under social, political, and religious scrutiny. Multiple practices of friendship fused love with carnal desire in a singular emotional register of love, or *'ishq*. Hence, throughout this book, I shed light on the capaciousness of love and friendship in seventeenth-century Isfahan, drawing attention to the intersection of their mutable forms with eroticism and sexuality and with practices of homoeroticism and homosociality. Only when *'ishq* is aligned with the ideals of platonic love in urban amical circles do the distinct lines between love, sex, eros, and friendship

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begin to be demarcated. Indeed, treatises on the protocols of friendship and manuals on composing letters to a friend abound in their disavowal of carnal love, instead stressing the importance of maintaining the secret of sexual desire. Whether they took the form of ethical essays on friendship or manuals that instructed readers in the art of writing friendship letters, these disciplinary texts were assembled in anthologies as didactic tools to learn the urban *adab* of masculinity. Anthologies archive the practices of mystic love informed by the language of urban friendships. Therefore, from the establishment of Isfahan as a capital to its consolidation as an imperial center of rule, the shifting history of friendship was bound to (and, indeed, collected by) the materiality of the anthology.

The control and display of the emotion of love and eros (*'ishq*) and its associated malady of melancholy (*sawda'*), expressed in the longing for God, the beloved, had its own history in the ubiquitous realm of Sufism, which was so integral to the daily lives of Isfahan's residents. To be a model Sufi meant that one had come under the spell of *'ishq*; love was the language, expressed in verse and prose, through which intimacy was configured. Even as the ultimate purpose was to direct the Sufi disciple toward God, in fraternal communities this was to be achieved through human guidance. And so Sufism concerned itself with the disciplining of *adab* as an entire set of behaviors meant to regulate the carnal body and align the self, through the intermediation of the Sufi master, with the celestial order.

Ritual gazing was a stage that Sufi devotees had to master on their journey toward union with the divine; its aim was to provoke the simultaneous sensations of separation from and longing for their object of desire. Boy gazing (*shahid bazi*) depicted the practitioner, often an older bearded man, contemplating a beautiful beardless youth (*amrad*), who represented the divine on earth. And because the mystic was meant to practice seeking and loving God, not the beautiful male youth, he was forbidden from acting on his carnal desire. In a typical composition, two drawings attributed to Riza Abbasi (d. 1635) materialize this state of separation between the beautiful beloved and the Sufi gazer (Figure 0.5). These drawings were executed on two separate sheets of paper and then assembled side by side in a *muraqqa'*. A grid separates them and confines each to its original state of composition. The placement of these two images, in dialogue with one another, illustrates how ritual gazing was a method of contemplation meant to help achieve the mystic lover's self-discipline and purification. Here, the Sufi

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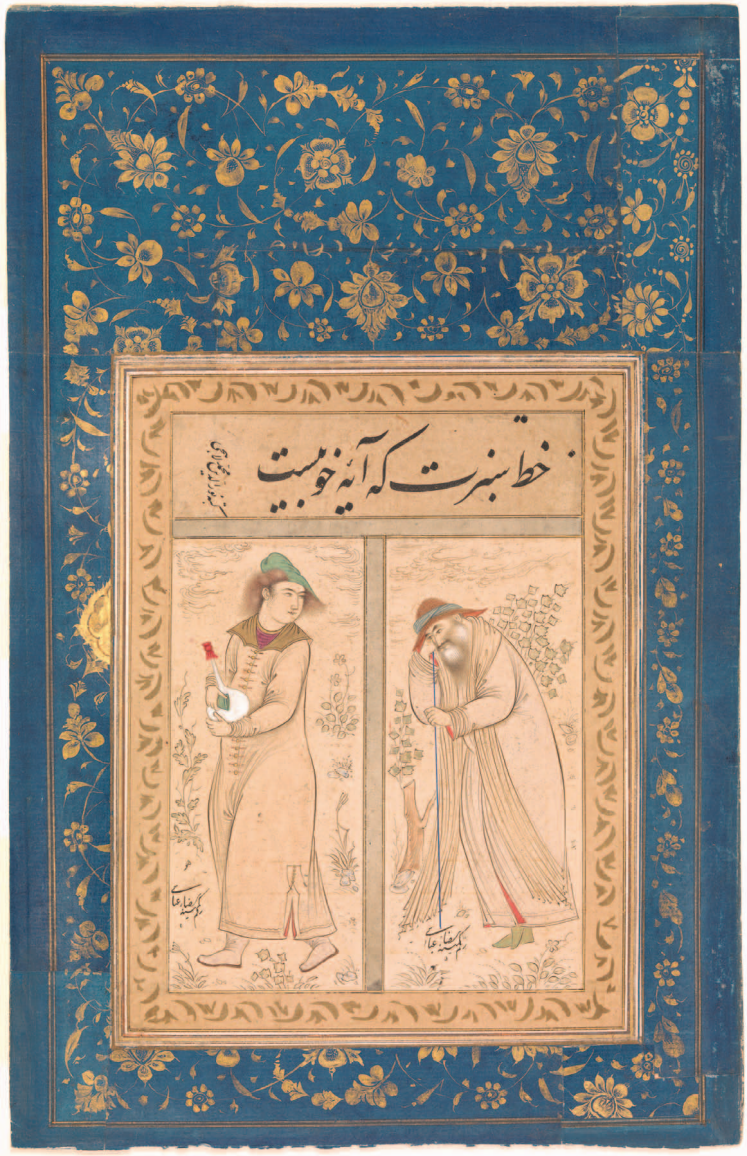

FIGURE 0.5 Composite image of two drawings by Riza Abbasi (d. 1635), *Old Man and the Youth*, with his signature: "Drawn by the humble Riza Abbasi." The two drawings are mounted on a folio of a *muraqqa'* with a line of poetry written by the calligrapher Nur al-Din Muhammad Lahiji in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. 12.7 cm × 5.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 25.68.5. Fletcher Fund, 1925.

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lover gazes and is stirred by desire, yet any actual encounter is simultaneously arrested in this activity. Desire was the emotional mechanism that made recognition and appreciation of true beauty possible, and here, on paper, erotic desire is activated.

A poem frames the diptych to guide the viewer's understanding of the image. Written by another calligrapher, Nur al-din Muhammad al-Lahiji, whose signature appears in the left margin of a third sheet of paper, the hemistich reads, "Your green line [*khatt*] is a beautiful sign." The word *khatt* here refers to the first sign of facial hair above the beloved's lip; this line is commonly referred to as green because of the way black hair is perceived as it grows on olive skin. But *khatt* means more than just a *line* of hair, or of poetry. It also means an inscription and script. A resident reading this hemistich (*khatt*) would associate it with a young beloved, an object of desire. The collating of these two images expands on that meaning of *khatt*. This is an iconic image of Sufi gazing. To absorb the ritual context of gazing, the images, together with the line of poetry, explain the rules of its practice. The green line of the beloved is both a liminal symbol of masculinity and a male fetish. But when located within Sufism, celibacy and boy gazing signify the sacred. This etiquette involves a doubled action on the part of the mystic gazer: desiring while refraining from acting on that desire by remaining celibate. In short, the very process of disciplining the gaze allows for and indeed produces more sexual desire.

The media that embody the word and the image in this patchwork are ink and opaque watercolors on paper; they were later mounted on a gold-leafed page and incorporated into a *muraqqaʿ* album. This composition makes explicit the relationship between the act of writing and the object of reading. The figure of the bearded man leaning on a staff inscribes and channels the viewer's gaze on the ground's pliant surface, which in turn points to the artist's signature (*khatt*). The drawing and writing (*khatt*) signal the other *khatt*, the line of poetry that connects the two images, and teaches the gazing anthologizer how to look for and read the green *khatt* on the beloved's face. Together the collage generates a dialogue that communicates how gazing and celibacy complement one another, because it signals to the reader where to look and how and what to see through the words, lines, and images. This composite image, part of an anthology of other writings and subjects, represents a patchwork of "lines" that gradually engross and instruct the gazer. This quintessential object of *adab*, embodied and inscribed, illustrates how the *muraqqaʿ* works heuristically to

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orient the reader, and it presents the reasons that such ideals produced alternative homoerotic practices, which would prove so problematic for the Safavi state's model of proper *adab* comportment.

If court and mosque marshaled literacy to discipline the social and carnal body, by the middle of the seventeenth century anti-Sufi polemics published in Isfahan suggest a historical shift characterized by the perception of homoerotic desire as a problem to be disciplined, regulated, or reformed. Sexual desire between loving men and women was deemed obstructive to efforts of stabilizing social and gender identities within the local regime of differentiation. Men, whether craftsmen, merchants, courtiers, or travelers, spent much of their day working and enjoying leisure pastimes in separate domestic and public spheres, cultivating intimate bonds that complemented familial hierarchies within Isfahan's male networks. Influential Shi'a clerics, tending to a growing heterogeneous population, began to voice their mistrust of male sociability. Anxious about its disruptive erotic potential, they identified such practices as obstructing procreation and moral probity. Under the guise of a moral campaign that relied on decrees, as well as on ethical manuals and treatises asserting the law and rule of the sharia, Shi'a scholars promoted heterosexual marriage to control spiritual and sexual practices and to cultivate subjects whose economic and sexual production would further state interests. Between 1640 and 1650 prominent clerics in Isfahan penned more than twenty treatises condemning Sufism, boy gazing, and celibacy, privileging matrimony instead. The Sufi practice of gazing came to signify *excess*, which stigmatized its practitioners as deviants in the community.

Homosexual acts (*livat*), associated in Islamic law with anal intercourse and penetration, were generally condemned as a major sin.[36] Although it is difficult to ascertain whether and how these legal injunctions were historically enforced, anxieties about sexual behavior in Sufi circles reveal that after the death of Shah Abbas I, Safavi monarchs and the Shi'a clerical establishment feared that intimacy between spiritual brothers and friends in confraternities and mystical orders could easily lead to political solidarities strong enough to resist religious, perhaps even imperial, sovereignty. The phobia around male homoerotic bonds in Sufi circles was not a Shi'a phenomenon. In contemporaneous Sunni Ottoman Istanbul attacks against Sufi rituals, dance (*sama'*), and music (*zikr*) as well as the practice of shaving the beard resulted in similar condemnations of Sufi brotherhoods.[37] The historical transformations that pushed Sufism, the original belief system of the Safavi

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revolution, to the outer limits of acceptable spirituality are complex. Suffice it to say here that Sufism was a popular mode of religiosity that competed with the dynastic household's newly established religion of Shi'ism and with the Safavi shahs' claims to sacred kingship.[38] An entire mystical way of life, which had permeated confraternities, Sufi brotherhoods, coffeehouses, and networks of friendship across households, was thus condemned.

Admonitions against Sufi practices in Isfahan took the form of public decrees that banned the consumption of wine, rice ale, opium, and hashish as well as the frequenting of brothels, music halls, and gambling houses. As seen in engravings on the walls of the medieval mosque in the old quarter of Isfahan, these leisurely activities had been forbidden a century before the establishment of the city as the capital in 1593.[39] Decrees prohibiting the shaving of beards were more widely published in the city's new quarters after the death of Shah Abbas I, who had transferred the capital to Isfahan. These were posted in the bazaar, hammams, and coffeehouses to inform inhabitants about the rigor with which the court intended to enforce regulations regarding public conduct and behavior. Coffeehouses were especially targeted as homoerotic spaces because the young men who served coffee also allegedly engaged in sex work. Male youths with long braided hair were barred from the public space of the bazaar. Female sex workers who had been licensed to work and walk the streets at night had their permits revoked. Seventeenth-century chroniclers include these edicts' texts and note that, even though the court had in the past legalized the practice of female prostitution, which provided sizable annual revenues (20,000 tomans) for the royal treasury, these activities were now strictly forbidden.[40] The Grand Vizier Sultan al-Ulama (d. 1660), himself a religious scholar, publicly punished transgressors; caught in a same-sex act, one male resident had his testicles nailed to a board and was then paraded through the city. In another case, female prostitution was turned into a public spectacle; a mother who had allegedly forced her daughter into the profession was thrown from a tower and her body fed to dogs. These violent displays of discipline were intended to instill fear in the public.

Reading the city of Isfahan includes reading a history of prohibitions and regulations. That the medieval mosque had been inscribed with warnings against carnal sins in the fifteenth century signals a prehistory to the constellation of interdictions that I investigate; the moment I capture is in part about shifting the culture of an urban image to different ends, namely, toward the *adab* of urbanity, of refinement

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in speech, manners, behaviors, and sexual desires. Technologies of power, public writings, and acts of torture clearly communicated to residents the consequences of misconduct. These mechanisms speak to the relationship between media and performance in the spectacle of public life. Edicts and the showcasing of discipline and shame accompanied manuals, handbooks, and treatises that attributed the state of corruption in the streets of Isfahan to Sufis who drank wine, listened to music, danced, and engaged in male homoerotic practices of gazing. The circulation of refutations (*radd*) against Sufis, penned by Isfahan's prominent religious scholars, alerts us to the growing importance of communicating on paper in public spaces as a new way of engaging in public discourse, enhancing many of the cultural roles played by face-to-face interactions.[41]

These ethical proscriptions were scrupulous enough not to overlook beards. The first sign of a beard heralded manhood, at which stage being penetrated became taboo.[42] According to the decrees engraved on mosque walls, sharia law would punish a beardless youth if he prostituted himself in a hammam. And if a man persistently shaved his beard, *delaying* his entry into manhood with its prescribed responsibilities of work, marriage, and reproduction, he was cast as a threat to the social order. These ways of defining the religious self are also reflected in the anthologies; conscious of the disciplinary modes of behavior, men in the anthologies censor themselves, negotiate, and speak out against contemporary technologies of power.

The anthology was the peculiar product of a discoursing city that incited people to write, curating texts and urban and sexual selves. The impulse to create new kinds of texts on new kinds of surfaces, from the walls of Isfahan to the sheets of paper that gave shape to the anthology, presented new textual and social logics and invited exploration of the capital's homoerotic culture *alongside* more normative versions of power and authority. Different "distributions of the visible" in these anthologies pushed against the rules of what could be said and shared in the city.[43] Suddenly there was not just a canon to be known and rehearsed but an opening to compare and assert the equivalence of things that had never before existed in the same frame.

Reader's Guide to the Anthologies

The incitement to expression, through the practice of writing, drawing, and collecting in the privacy of households, led to new forms and uses of word and image. To guide the reader through networks of circulating urban texts, I focus on the

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writing of distinct modes of communication. Manuals, model letters, and drawings and paintings are the generic urban texts that negotiated city life; they serve as actual and heuristic guides to my anthologizing the city. As we move between the imperial Safavi project, the urban media of household anthologies, and individual residents, eight resident authors act as our city guides (Map 0.1). We begin with Shah Abbas I and Shaykh Baha'i's imperial imaginations of Isfahan and then measure the reception of official visual and verbal texts in household anthologies through the alternative experiences of six other residents, as mediated by their poetry, drawings, manuals, and letters.

Chapter 1, "Imperial Visions of Sovereignty," begins with the spectacle of sovereignty in Isfahan. Shah Abbas I's imperial building project of the square was to transform Isfahan into an urban image of paradise, modeling the experience of an ideal city as the epitome of beauty and desire. To ensure that the shah's imprint on the cityscape would endure as a symbol of his jurisdiction and authority, his name and composition were inscribed across the main square. Spatially divided into four quarters and regimented into clearly defined sections, the rectangular plaza was the page the shah authored as his anthology of the city. The ways in which he and the religious scholar Shaykh Baha'i planned the built environment in and around the square, as well as the epigraphy the shaykh commissioned for the walls of the Friday Prayer Mosque, collectively reveal how monarch and shaykh wished their subjects to experience state-sponsored forms of urbanity. This chapter lays the groundwork for the making of Isfahan's homoerotic culture and its reception in anthologies.

To guide the reader around the contours of verbal and visual anthologies, I turn to the themes of collecting, self-fashioning, and community in Chapter 2. A close reading of two resident anthologizers, a religious scholar and a painter, considers the subjects of their collected words and images to show how these practices illuminate their encounter and experience of the city. The anthology of Shi'a cleric Aqa Husayn Khwansari (d. 1687) reveals shared texts that connected him with Isfahan's literary community. This agent of conversion to Shi'ism taught at a prominent seminary in the bazaar and composed decrees prohibiting the consumption of alcohol and Sufi practices of male gazing. But he collected romances and essays on love and desire. A close reading of his curatorial choices allows us to hear tensions and ambivalences that nuance this religious scholar's public face. A reconstruction of the painter Muhammad Qasim's (d. 1660) dispersed portfolio assembles a patchwork of his life and

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1. **Shaykh Baha'i** (d. 1621): religious scholar born in Baalbek, migrates as a child with his family to Isfahan, then to Qazvin, Mashhad and Herat, finally settles in Isfahan. Travels to Damascus, Mecca and Medina, then back to Isfahan, is buried in Mashhad.

2. **Mir Muhammad Mansur Semnani** (alive in 1656): religious scholar and poet, born in Semnan travels back and forth between Isfahan and Semnan. Author of a shahrashub on Isfahan.

3. **Shah Abbas I** (1571-1629): Safavi king born in Herat, enthroned in Qazvin, moves the capital to Isfahan in 1590-5, walks a thousand kilometers in 1601 to the shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad and died in Farahabad, Mazandaran (a province).

4. **Urdubadi widow** (alive in the 1660): poet and pilgrim, lived in Isfahan. Goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina through Tabriz, Urdubad, Aleppo, Damascus, Mecca and Medina then back to Aleppo.

5. **Nasira Hamadani** (d. 1620): religious scholar and literati born in Hamadan, as a child he moved to Isfahan with his father, then to Shiraz and Hyderabad.

6. **Aqa Husayn Khwansari** (d. 1686): religious scholar born in Khwansar, migrates to Isfahan as a seminary student where he has a successful career, buried in Isfahan.

7. **Muhammad Qasim** (d. 1660): painter born in Tabriz, migrated to Isfahan, worked for the Governor of Mashhad while living in Isfahan where he is buried.

8. **Sa'ib Tabrizi** (1592-1676): poet born in Tabriz, moves to Isfahan then to Kabul in 1624 and back to Isfahan in 1632.

MAP 0.1 Early modern Eurasian cities and the mobility of the characters whose anthologies are studied in this book. Drawn by Matilde Grimaldi.

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shows the range of his clients' commissioned works. From his self-portraits to the activities of women and men in his drawings, Muhammad Qasim created a collage of city life in Isfahan that reveals what the verbal archive conceals. The practices according to which these two migrants to the capital fashioned their urban selves guide my reading of their authorial voices and of their writing of Isfahan's habitus.

Chapter 3, "Disturbing the City," mediates the opposing views of the imperial imaginary and the city of Isfahan as allegories of the spiritual journey to paradise. For the cleric and poet Aqa Mansur Semnani (alive in 1656), the physical delights of Isfahan lay in its wealth of beautiful male youth. He visualized the city for his audience through the poetic form of the *shahrashub*, literally "city disturbance." In this chapter, then, I focus on how the effort to create ideological unity in Shah Abbas I's rebuilding of Isfahan could be unsettled by Aqa Mansur's work preserved in anthologies, and I consider the degree to which the imperial project was real, or lived, or successful. Deploying a new form of authority based on the vitality of embodied experiences, Aqa Mansur Semnani's literary experiment challenged the imperial vision, using *'ishq* (love that is desiring) and humor to reimagine the city of power as the very symbol of transcendent authority. His popular guidebook to Isfahan represents the city as a masculine space where friends are educated in the *adab* of erotic love. Moreover, Aqa Mansur identifies this city disturbance with a manual (*dastur al-'amal*) in response to a letter from his beloved friend, Aqa Rukn al-Din, signaling the poet's consciousness of manuals and letters as dialogic urban modes of communication.

Chapter 4, "Cultivating and Disciplining Friendship Letters," uncovers the archeology of sworn friendships in early modern Isfahan through the medium of epistolary practices. Friendship letters were respectable forms of social exchange collected across anthologies to model and memorialize social networks of voluntary kinship. Categorized by scribes and owners of anthologies as a genre, *rasa'il-i ikhvaniyyat*, or "fraternal" letters, were media by which to maintain social relations; they reflected anxieties around the vicissitudes of friendships. Vows of brotherhood enacted through words and images were assembled together with model friendship letters and personal letters. In this chapter I analyze the materiality and social dynamics of voluntary kinships as epistolary performances of male friendship; gifts of paintings to friends are read together with their accompanying letters to reflect on how Isfahan's urban culture transformed the grammar and aesthetics of male

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friendship. In particular, the most commonly assembled letters, written by Nasira Hamadani (d. 1620), provide the means to explore the affective language and sentiments of verbal communication between friends in and out of Isfahan.

In the concluding chapter, "Family Archives and Female Spaces of Intimacy," I discuss the women who have been excluded from the act of writing their own anthology to present a reading of gendered literacy and female friendship through an anthology collected in the library of the Urdubadi family of bureaucrats and poets. The anthology is a family archive, in which the sociology of the household where it was produced, from the professional occupation of its patrons to the family's public engagement with the city, is rendered legible. The decisive role of a female family member, the Urdubadi widow, whose pilgrimage to Mecca is recorded in this anthology, uncovers the connections between female members of a household and public life. As the nameless widow leaves Isfahan, she deploys dominant mystic discourses on erotic desire to write her experience in verse (*masnavi*), experimenting with realist poetics that allow her to speak about the modalities of her attachments to city and kin. In the process of writing, she also divulges her love for a female companion who was forced to leave Isfahan because of rumors circulating about their friendship. An empathetic community comes into view, established through a ritual of sisterhood, *khwahar khwandagi*, which made use of the language of mysticism to express love and friendship. A selection of Muhammad Qasim's paintings executed for a female clientele brings the visual into dialogue with the verbal, enhancing our understanding of the meanings of female friendships.

These residents' words and images relate their particular experiences of Isfahan, just as they demonstrate the larger conversations transpiring in the discoursing city. Seven men and one woman give voice and form to my own curated anthology of Isfahan (see Map 0.1). My reading of the seventeenth-century collections is but one way of interpreting these household productions. My process began with touching hundreds of folios, flipping page after page as I considered the multitude of ways the script filled the different dimensions of bound sheets of paper. Skimming my way through the paleography and guided by the writing, desiring, and reading practices there inscribed, I learned how to see, read, and write about them. The collected materials by which anthologizers gave meaning to their city life have in turn shaped my historical construction of Isfahan. The impulse behind my choice of manuals, model letters, drawings, and paintings entailed a reflection on how they

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figured in a set of practices that were embedded in the everyday life of a metropolis in the making. Broadening our view of Isfahan's physical, financial, and political topography to include the rich variety of anthologies and the contexts in which the practice of reading and writing took place allows us to discern new ties between seeing and desiring the city. Created at a historical moment of urbanization, these anthologies serve as new vehicles and models for communication that challenge the historiography on Isfahan, which assumes a certain familiarity with the city, whose monumental architecture has survived the passage of time. The architectural success of the central square, the Naqsh-i Jahan, as a public space in the modern city has rendered its development in the early modern era legible, as though, by merely stepping onto the ground walked by its residents five centuries earlier, we can imagine its history and the affects it produced and engaged. The turquoise, lapis, and yellow tiles of its domes and walls and the ubiquity of its calligraphy continue to draw the visitor into the square's auratic sense of aesthetics. But how did inhabitants born in Isfahan during the early decades of the seventeenth century experience their city's transformation? And how did migrants entering the new capital read the density of its words, images, colors, and people? The anthologies defamiliarize the city; they confuse our modern perceptions and reorient the historian conscious of the past's difference. In this history of Isfahan, I mine the anthologies for tools with which to weave my writing of early modern Isfahan, just as they were once assembled to help residents navigate and forge relationships in a growing metropolis. My own act of reading becomes part of writing the urban experience of Isfahan's conversion into a cosmopolitan capital city.

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